

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (previously presented) For use with a flexible strap having a substantially uniform width and thickness and an end tab of increased thickness, a buckle for capturing and releasably retaining said end tab, said buckle comprising:

a base;

parallel side walls extending upwardly from and cooperating with said base to define an open-ended receiving channel having an entry end and an exit end;

first slots extending transversally across said base, said buckle being attached to said strap by weaving said strap into and out of said channel through said first slots; and

flanges spaced vertically from said base and extending inwardly in cantilever fashion from said side walls to define an open-ended second slot communicating with and extending along the length of said receiving channel, said second slot being configured and dimensioned to accommodate longitudinal pinching and lateral insertion of said strap into said receiving channel, said flanges having undersides configured to accommodate receipt of said end tab in said receiving channel via said entry end, and to releasably wedge said end tab in and prevent withdrawal of said end tab from said receiving channel via said exit end;

wherein said flanges have converging sections leading from a maximum width of said slot at the entry end of said receiving channel to a reduced width of said slot at an intermediate location along the length of said channel.

2. – 8. (canceled).

9. (previously presented) For use with a flexible strap having a substantially uniform width and thickness and an end tab of increased thickness, a buckle for capturing and releasably retaining said end tab, said buckle comprising:

a base;

parallel side walls extending upwardly from and cooperating with said base to define an open-ended receiving channel having an entry end and an exit end; and

flanges spaced vertically from said base and extending inwardly in cantilever fashion from said side walls to define an open-ended slot communicating with and extending along the length of said receiving channel, said slot being configured and dimensioned to accommodate longitudinal pinching and lateral insertion of said strap into said receiving channel, and said flanges having undersides with downwardly sloping jamming surfaces configured to frictionally retain said end tab in said receiving channel;

wherein said flanges have converging sections leading from a maximum width of said slot at the entry end of said receiving channel to a reduced width of said slot at an intermediate location along the length of said channel.

10. (canceled).

11. (previously presented) The buckle of claims 1 or 9 wherein said end tab defines a shoulder extending transversally across the width of said strap, and wherein the undersides of said flanges define stop surfaces engageable with said shoulder.

12. (previously presented) The buckle of claim 11 wherein said jamming surfaces slope downwardly towards said stop surfaces.

13. (previously presented) The buckle of claim 9 wherein said base is secured to a section of said strap.

14. (previously presented) The buckle of claim 9 wherein said base is formed as an integral part of a carrier structure.

15. (previously presented) The buckle of claim 13 further comprising attachment slots extending transversally across said base, said buckle being attached to said strap by weaving said strap into and out of said channel through said attachment slots.

16. (new) The buckle of claim 1 wherein said end tab defines a shoulder extending transversally across the width of said strap, and wherein the undersides of said flanges define stop surfaces engageable with said shoulder.

17. (new) The buckle of claim 16 wherein the undersides of said flanges further define jamming surfaces sloping downwardly towards said stop surfaces.

18. (new) The buckle of claim 1 wherein said base is secured to a section of said strap.

19. (new) The buckle of claim 1 wherein said base is formed as an integral part of a carrier structure.

20. (new) The buckle of claim 1 further comprising attachment slots extending transversally across said base, said buckle being attached to said strap by weaving said strap into and out of said channel through said attachment slots.